Newspapers by ancestry
https://www.newspapers.com/image/374157487/

Hartford Courant (Hartford, Connecticut) · Sat, Nov 4, 1989 · Page 20
Downloaded on Jul 2, 2025

'Phantom' just composing and decomposing

By MALCOLM L. JOHNSON
Courant Film Critic

Curiosity about just how far a greedy producer dares to go in stealing from the hottest theatrical property of the moment is about the only reason for venturing into "The Phantom of the Opera."

Although decently made — partly in New York, partly in London, mostly in Budapest — this "Phantom" offers no suspense, no horror, only disgusting make-up jobs by Kevin Yagher, a former Halloween-mask maker with a gruesome new idea.

In one of the first close-ups of the Phantom (alias Eric Destler), Robert Englund (alias Freddy Krueger) is seen sewing his face together. His face, it seems, is rotted, and to make repairs, the Phantom needs fresh skin. Thus we get flayed victims, though occasionally — perhaps because of time considerations — Eric will take home a head.

There's one other new wrinkle in the screenplay by Duke Sandefur, based on a story by Gerry O'Hara. (No mention is made of Gaston Leroux, who only created "The Phantom of the Opera.") Like Dracula, the Phantom exists throughout time, kept alive by a haunting little melody written by Misha Segal, perhaps after listening to Andrew Lloyd Webber's music.

The film begins with a search through a New York music library by a Juilliard soprano named Christine Day (rather than Daae in the original). In this dusty, disordered place — Juilliard should fire its music librarian — Christine's friend and piano accompanist discovers an old manuscript by Eric Destler, "Don Juan Triumphant," and suggests it might make a good audition piece. Christine agrees, but while giving her all on the stage of a darkened Broadway house, she is knocked unconscious by a stray sandbag and transported back a century — not to the Paris Opéra, where the Phantom has traditionally done his nasty work, but to London.

There, an earlier Christine is understudy to the obnoxious diva Carlotta in a production of Gounod's "Faust." As it happens, Christine has an angel. He isn't an angel of music, as in the Lloyd Webber "Phantom," because that might bring on a lawsuit. But this dark angel appears to Chistine in her boudoir and coaches her fiercely and demandingly.

Even to make these appearances, the Phantom must fix his face. The skin of a clumsy stagehand comes in handy, and the bloody, dying, skinned corpse also serves to frighten Carlotta into yielding the role of Marguerite to little Christine.

For a time, Englund shows some range as the hoarse-voiced Phantom. But the screenplay makes this once-brilliant composer much less witty than Freddy, and Englund is left with little to do but skin and sew. And Jill Schoelen is rather bland as Christine. Dwight H. Little, who directed "Halloween 4," displays style but develops no narrative drive in this misbegotten "Phantom," a ripoff so flimsy that the backers of the London-Broadway smash hit shouldn't even bother suing.

Rated R, this film contains a bit of nudity and lots of gore, much of it fairly disgusting, though not awfully convincing.

Century Film

Robert Englund, above left and below, stars in the new "Phantom of the Opera" with Stephanie Lawrence, above right, but it's a shoddy attempt to cash in on the Broadway success of the same name.

Film review

THE PHANTOM OF THE OPERA, Directed by Dwight H. Little; screenplay by Duke Sandefur, based on a screenplay by Gerry O'Hara; director of photography, Peter Collister; music composed by Misha Segal; makeup effects created by Kevin Yagher; produced by Harry Alan Towers; executive producer, Menahem Golan. A 21st Century Productions release, playing at Showcase Cinemas, East Hartford. Running time: 95 minutes.

½

The Phantom, Eric Destler	Robert Englund
Christine Day	Jill Schoelen
Richard	Alex Hyde-White
Barton	Bill Nighy
Carlotta	Stephanie Lawrence
Hawking	Terence Harvey
Davies	Nathan Lewis
Harrison	Peter Clapham
Meg (New York)	Molly Shannon
Meg (London)	Emma Rawson
Mott	Mark Ryan
Ratcatcher	Yehuda Efroni

★★★★ Excellent; ★★★ Very Good; ★★ Good; ★ Fair; ☆ Poor

Phantom Just Composing and Decomposing

Clipped By:
C_St_Reed
Jul 2, 2025

Copyright © 2025 Newspapers.com. All Rights Reserved.